

THE SOMNIUM  
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FINAL CANDIDATE 6

"THE EYE TAKES A PERSON INTO THE WORLD. THE EAR BRINGS THE  
WORLD INTO A HUMAN BEING"

- LORENZ OKEN

CHARACTERS WITH SPEAKING PARTS:

NARRATOR

OLIVE

OLD MAN

RADIO

ACT 1.

SCENES 1-7

ACT 2.

SCENES 1-5

ACT 3.

SCENES 1-5

ACT 1. SCENE 1.

[In the confusion of early morning. As if sipping coffee and recalling a dream, talking to someone whose job is to listen.]

NARRATOR

There was some sort of war going on all over the world, I mean all over. There were no designated battlefields. There were only playgrounds, and elevators, and kitchen sinks. Every nook and cranny was fair game. You couldn't run from this war.

I mean, just imagine something that won't go away. Like air, but thicker. Or, like a memory, only not exactly a memory.

The war was a toxic mountain sitting on every horizon. It wouldn't go away. It couldn't be ignored. It transcended the senses. You'd shut your eyes and you'd see its endless peaks billowing thick smoke. You'd hear echoes stuck frozen in the valley. The world was just beginning to learn the meaning of permanent.

Everything was the war. Everything would always be the war. And, I wanted out.

ACT 1. SCENE 2.

[At The Fountain of Life there is something unshakable that spans time forever in every direction. Olive asks for another story.]

OLIVE

Tell me another story.

OLD MAN

Now? It's so late. I'm very tired Olive. How about tomorrow?

ACT 1. SCENE 3.

[Back to the confusion of early morning.]

NARRATOR

Time was when we didn't know each other and the war had hardly begun. Dog barks sounded like candy and everyone was secretly giving everyone else a high five.

Her birthparents had named her Olive and abandoned her. She was raised by The Fountain of Life Living Center, a home for the elderly.

Shortly after Olive was born, her parents wrapped her in a fuzzy pink blanket, placed the blanket into a basket, and placed the basket into the back of their beat up, rusted out Chrysler.

In the basket, clipped to the blanket was a note, which read, "We are abandoning our precious little gem. We are unfit to care for such beauty."

Her parents had planned on driving far away, to lose themselves and then abandon their baby little girl.

To ease the process, they surrounded themselves with ambiguity. They rejected control. Sometime between then and now, Olive's parents delivered the basket to the wrong doorstep.

She spent the first many years of her life in a nursing home, where she was surrounded by the wisdom of the elderly.. slowly returning to dust.

This was most likely for the better. If Olive's parents could have seen into the future, that basket would have

landed across the street, and Olive would have spent the first many years of her life at Orphan Oasis 3000; A state of the art facility that turns baby little children into gears, switches, and locking mechanisms.

The caretakers at The Fountain of Life considered carrying Olive, fuzzy pink blanket, basket and all, across the street to the orphanage.

But one look at her,  
Her eyes.  
Her big round olive eyes.  
If you saw them, you'd understand.  
Her eyes unlocked secrets people never knew they had.  
Her eyes were beautiful.

The war began at the very same moment that the caretakers looked into her eyes.



ACT 1. SCENE 4.

[At The Fountain of Life, the elderly are suiting up for lunch. Olive asks for another story. The canary passes the torch.]

OLIVE

Tell me another story.

OLD MAN

I don't have any more stories.

OLIVE

Tell me the one about when you were king.

ACT 1. SCENE 5.

[Back to the confusion of early morning. This scene passes freely between the narrator's dialogue with the listener, his interior monologue, and his impermeable memories.]

NARRATOR

I met her through an ad in the paper. It said, "Want to trade stories? Call Fountain of Life Living Center, ask for Olive."

When we met, we were both too naïve to realize there was a war going on. A certain gravity pulled my eyes towards hers.

They were incredible. I watched her one-thousand dark green sunsets over and over.

Blink

Blink

Sunset

[A long pause removes us from this moment, or moves us to another part of it]

I could hardly breathe.

OLIVE

So you want to trade stories?

NARRATOR

I wanted to dive into her soul, into her olive eyes, into her one thousand never ending..

I had forgotten why I was there, in this dimly lit nursing home, face to face with a girl named Olive. She made me forget everything.

OLIVE

You know, stories... things people tell each other when they're not busy saying important things.

NARRATOR

I made up a story on the spot, about a goat who accidentally ate a diamond ring. It wasn't an especially good story, but Olive liked it. What pleased her more than listening to stories, was telling them.

Her story was about a very successful king who gave up on his entire empire, and went off searching for something. The story didn't really end with a punch line or a moral.

Olive just said,

OLIVE

"And to this very day, the king still regrets abandoning his empire."

NARRATOR

Her stories didn't end like other stories I knew. She had a way with words. Her stories brought words to life, and brought life to other places.

I asked her if the king was still alive. She said he's not alive because it's a story.

ACT 1. SCENE 6.

[A diner or a lobby frozen in time. The sort of place that has the potential to be cozy but isn't. There's something abrasive here, and the color gray comes to mind. We are about to experience the war.]

NARRATOR

A radio was chattering in the background. We were sitting on a couch somewhere... in a diner or a hotel lobby. We were watching a fly chase a ceiling fan into infinity.

Tragedy. An unidentified male in his late twenties, with sand between his toes, wearing a platinum crown, and dressed in velvet robes, was dead.

RADIO

The man's wardrobe is estimated to be worth millions of dollars. His identity remains a mystery. The police are asking anyone with any information to please contact them immediately

NARRATOR

Then a commercial for that new thing no one cared about and the radio returned to the background, where it belonged.

No one ever paid attention to that radio ever again. What horrible news. As we left the lobby, I wondered if we were really there, watching a fly chase a ceiling fan into infinity.

ACT 1. SCENE 7.

[Nowhere really. A place where thoughts reverberate.]

NARRATOR

Why are you so afraid?

ACT 2. SCENE 1.

[Another in a succession of early mornings. Perhaps this morning's confusion has subsided thanks to the caffeine. Talking to someone whose job is to understand.]

NARRATOR

We shook. All of us shook. When the ground under our feet stopped shaking, our nature was different and new. The war had grown to a new intensity, previously unimaginable, now unforgettable. I knew that the nature of causality was now fundamentally different, but how it had changed I couldn't recall.

On the surface, it felt as if nothing had changed. As if the war was still a little seed barely sprouting. Underneath, it felt as if everything had changed. As if we were now the seed, or we had shrunk or the seed had grown but was still a seed. As if we had consumed it, or it had consumed us.

I felt off. Every reaction appeared to be an action to the war. I began to take note of when things seemed different. Olive endearingly called me crazy. She said it with joking pouty lips. She said the word crazy like it was a trophy I'd won for just being me.

The war was rotting out my mind, and restructuring my thoughts.

I kept tabs on things that struck me as odd. What began as a list grew into a journal, then an epic account of the present tense. Portions of which, I presented to Olive as a story. We were celebrating.

ACT 2. SCENE 2.

[At the shore, or perhaps a reconstructed memory of a shore.  
It's nice out. The shore is blank.]

NARRATOR

We sat by the shore, waves cycled a breeze through us.

OLIVE

"Tell away,"

NARRATOR

As if these stories were little pets I'd outgrown and  
was now ready to set free.

I had prepared three portions of my epic account of the  
present tense to give to Olive.

I considered presenting them to her as if I were a  
lawyer, she the jury, and the stories - evidence that  
everything is infected with a virus called the war; but  
that's no birthday present.

Instead, I presented myself as the clown. Each story, a  
helium balloon. And Olive, the birthday girl with magic  
in the air surrounding her day.

ACT 2. SCENE 3.

[The narrator tells three stories to Olive. Was this how Kepler felt when he published The Somnium?]

OLIVE

The first story was about these farmers.

NARRATOR

Me and Olive are lying in a grassy field. If we were standing, the grass would be up to our knees.

They slipped something into the water here. Someone dumped a whole bunch of chemicals into the region's main reservoir, and the local farmers all went insane. They all broke down and cried to each other. They started crying and writing poetry and stopped farming. They abandoned their crops, and turned to support groups where they held hands and talked about their feelings.

Then, the farmers decided it would be best to become autonomous. They pooled their resources together and learned to share. They cut themselves off from the outside world. They were, in every respect, self-sufficient. They bred their own livestock. They built schools and hospitals. They generated their own energy. They formed their own government and their own army.

They had a motto. Something about "striving for perfection through an enlightened global consciousness."

They built huge un-scaleable mud walls around their entire compound. They had to rebuild the mud walls



every time it rained. No one ever entered or left the compound, even when it rained.

Me and Olive are lying in one of their grassy fields, we traveled here in a dream. On our way here, we cuddled and smushed our feet together. When we got here, the first things we noticed were all the dandelions, they're bigger than trees. They must have been genetically engineered or something. They're ridiculously beautiful.

OLIVE

The second story was about a traveler's return.

NARRATOR

I met a guy who'd walked across the desert. He'd just returned to the civilized world and he looked as if he'd just abandoned love. He'd been gone for so long, he'd forgotten what the streets sounded like. Cars, rain, asphalt, people's voices, the 60 hertz hum, the wind carrying car stereo pit pat thumps all through and accumulating in narrow alleyway's nooks and crannies. He'd forgotten that day and night don't sound so different out here.

He was stumbling across the sidewalk; he'd just bought a pair of sunglasses from a street vendor. His clothes were torn. He wasn't looking at anyone, but then he looked at me.

"Hey, know anyone who wants to listen?" he asked.

We went and found Olive. He sat down and told her his tale.

I didn't pay attention. I watched Olive's pulse journey off to somewhere else. Not sure where. But I followed it. I was thinking, "Once you start looking for storytellers, they are everywhere."

I followed Olive's pulse back to me. She was looking at me. The storyteller was gone. Her face said thank you. We went off in search of something new.

OLIVE

The third story was about a little boy.

NARRATOR

There's a kid stuck in a tree. He's scared, because he doesn't know of any way to get down besides falling. And falling would hurt him, maybe even badly.

There's no one down there to catch you. And you're so confused. Who knows how long you've been stuck up there. The scariest thing is that you're losing your grasp on time. The only thing to do is climb further up the tree. The sun's up in the sky. It's been in the same spot for a while. You can't retrace your steps. Every branch looks like every other. Up looks like down. Down looks like up. Gravity is tugging on you ever so slightly. You're halfway to the moon. How are you breathing?

He dies up in that tree. So they hold a vigil around the tree with candles. Sad songs. The next day the tree's got no shadow.

Someone buries wishes down in between the tree's roots. More people follow. After a little while it looks as if the tree's been planted in bits of paper and ink.

ACT 2. SCENE 4.

[The shore. Much quieter.]

NARRATOR

Olive curled into a ball and wept. The shore embraced Olive like only a grandfather could.

"Tears of joy?" I asked.

OLIVE

"I think so,"

NARRATOR

Good. I felt relieved. To her the stories were nothing more than stories, or maybe they were the brightly colored helium balloons I'd intended.

What kind of tears would fall out of her eyes if she found out that my stories were observations, and the war's fingerprint was with each?

ACT 2. SCENE 5.

[The place with the old man. It has emptied out, or it sounds quieter. Maybe everyone is enjoying a mid-afternoon nap.]

OLIVE

Will you tell me the king story now?

OLD MAN

Yes, but it will take some time to tell, you have time?

ACT 3. SCENE 1.

["I am moving all day and not moving at all. I am like the moon underneath the waves that ever go rolling." -

Anonymous]

NARRATOR

I've been thinking for a while. Things continue as only they can. Sharing my story with you couldn't have been a mistake. I miss your voice.

We're still sitting at the shore. Not five minutes have gone by. I'm watching you ache. I'm watching you toss away old ideas. You are making room for something new. What are you going to take in? What are you thinking?

OLIVE

You make the world make sense. I don't know where I've been, but it feels like a mirror.

NARRATOR

Olive? What if I told you there is no war? And a story is a story is a story?

ACT 3. SCENE 2.

[The Fountain of Life, maybe day one.]

OLIVE

I give you all the time in the world.

ACT 3. SCENE 3.

[The shore with receding tide and nightfall. The wind is bowing its head in reverence.]

NARRATOR

You are beginning to doubt something. I can't tell what. Your eyes bring an intensity that is more than I can handle. I feel better now.

You are thinking, "a good king would be loyal to his subjects."

You're looking at me. Are you going to tell me a story? A story of stories? Are you going to say you love me? Are you going to come and cry on me now? If you cried on me, I would feel like I've done something right.

These shores and waves and sand would disappear. The war wouldn't matter. We could have a moment without direction. She is speaking to me.

OLIVE

I'm leaving now.



ACT 3. SCENE 4.

[The Fountain of Life. Olive is alone in a sea of words.]

OLD MAN

A long time ago, when the first sword was lifted, a king shut his eyes and said "enough." The whole world was a dark mine. And the king was a small yellow canary...

ACT 3. SCENE 5.

[In the clarity of early morning. Talking to someone who is not present.]

NARRATOR

Olive, maybe you are picking up where I left off. Our paths won't cross again. And you won't ever know how I've wished you good luck.